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ABSTRACT

This paper considers the concept of English as a global language in the context of South African educational policy. The paper first notes that the richer a country is the more possible it is for the rulers to take the social costs of language policy into account, i.e., the Netherlands and Canada can spend vast sums on different aspects of language policy, especially on the learning of foreign languages and on the accommodation of the languages of immigrant minorities, whereas most African countries are constrained to implement language in education policies that might seem irrational. It points out that for reasons that have to do with the modalities of colonial oppression in the 19th and 20th centuries, it seemed as though every newly independent African state was doomed to take the same language policy detour by accepting in practice the primacy of the ex-colonial language. It also discusses the existence of what has been called the "ESL industry" and its marginalizing effects on the African languages and the consequent disempowerment of the speakers of those languages. The paper then concentrates on the new language policy in education in South Africa and discusses the dilemmas and the problems to which this has given rise. It states that the most important features of the policy in regard to language medium is its commitment to an additive bilingualism approach as the desirable norm in all South African schools. The paper discusses the implications of this policy in detail. (Contains 31 references.) (NKA)

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English Unassailable but Unattainable: The Dilemma of Language Policy in South African Education.

by Neville Alexander

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N. E. Alexander

ENGLISH UNASSAILABLE BUT UNATTAINABLE

THE DILEMMA OF LANGUAGE POLICY IN SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATION

Professor Neville Alexander

English as a global language

The conference theme for which this keynote address has been prepared is in its entirety so relevant to the evolving language situation in South Africa that I should perhaps begin by complimenting the organisers for having invited a South African to make the initial input under this rubric. However, the reality of the global village and the processes of conquest and dispossession by which it was overtly inaugurated in 1415 could equally have let the choice fall on virtually any of the countries of the economic South. South Africa, thanks particularly to the aura that still surrounds the heroic figure of Nelson Mandela is simply one of the more prominent sites which illustrate the modalities of an international movement, i.e., the ever-expanding global hegemony of the English language and the apparently inexorable corollary marginalisation of local, national and regional languages.

The situation is, naturally, much more complex than that which is reflected in this generalisation. In a recent comprehensive review of three authoritative works on the future of the English language, Robert Phillipson points to the many contradictions involved. About Graddol's British-Council sponsored book on the future of English, he believes that

> If the book can reach beyond those who are committed to the promotion of English to those with a more open, multilingual agenda, it represents a promising starting-point for disentangling some of the many factors that currently strengthen English and might weaken it.

The impressive tome compiled by Fishman et al leads him to establish the need for much more scholarly research by "critical scholars working with grassroots forms of English and alternatives to English dominance", while Crystal's essay on global English throws up questions of linguistic human rights, for Phillipson since Crystal

> foresees the consolidation of "World Standard Spoken English", which he does not see as replacing other languages or (national) forms of English. This seems to imply a belief that English has become "global" without being causally linked to global trends and global injustice: the language happened to be at "the right place at the right time" (110). One wonders where it will be if and when all the globe's citizens and languages are to enjoy basic human rights. (Phillipson 1999, forthcoming)

A question that is foregrounded once again is that of the dialectical relationship between one or a few world languages on the one hand, and the death or extinction of numerous local and national languages. "Again", because this issue was debated especially in the then Soviet Union as the result of the facile speculations of Stalin (whose views on the matter, as is now generally accepted, were

based on the linguistic theories and vision of Nicolai Marr, whom he subsequently denounced because of "gross errors"). Stalin's views were popularised in a book that for a few decades influenced the political Left and all manner of lay linguists as regards the destiny and, thus, the importance of their own and other languages.

In South Africa, let me note parathetically, during the 'fifties, we debated with waxing passion the question whether we should pay any attention at all to the "tribal languages" instead of concentrating on English, the "international language". The debate was exacerbated and rendered particularly vicious by the fact that at the time, the Afrikaner National Party was using the very sensible UNESCO declarations on the importance of using vernacular languages as media of instruction in schools in order to justify and beautify its racist curriculum, which the world came to know as Bantu education.

Since this debate was left in the air, more or less, in the late 'fifties, new factors have come into play. Of these, the most important is our modern understanding of the value of human diversity, biological, political and cultural. Murray Gell-Mann, the 1969 Nobel prizewinner for Physics, among others, makes this point simply but effectively. He accepts that, under unfavourable conditions, differences among groups of people, sometimes so minute as to be invisible to the outsider continue to be used to justify social conflict and oppressive behaviour, including genocide. And, although we may be sceptical about his reasoning, we cannot fault the conclusion he arrives at, when he asserts that

> ...cultural diversity is itself a valuable heritage that should be preserved: that Babel of languages, that patchwork of religious and ethical systems, that panorama of myths, that potpourri of political and social traditions, accompanied as they are by many forms of irrationality and particularism. One of the principal challenges to the human race is to reconcile universalizing factors such as science, technology, rationality and freedom of thought with particularizing factors such as local traditions and beliefs, as well as simple differences in temperament, occupation and geography (Gell-Mann 1994:341)

As a result of this ethos, those of us who are proponents and supporters of the value of multilingualism can be compared with ecological and environmental activists who happen to be operating in the socio-linguistic domain. As in the domain of biology, the critical question is whether we will be able to make our product "profitable" and/or whether the ideological dimension can supersede the purely materialistic in such a way that people prefer to be multilingual even if it is not obviously of immediate or short-term material benefit to them. Coulmas (1992:148-149) discusses the relationship between economic and social costs in the determination of national and regional language policy and concludes that it is usually counter-productive to consider "economic costs" as though language were a purely micro-economic issue. He stresses the fact that the richer a country is the more possible it is for the rulers to take the social costs of language policy into account. Thus, countries such as the Netherlands and Canada can spend vast sums on different aspects of language policy, especially on the learning of foreign languages and on the accommodation of the languages of immigrant minorities, whereas most African countries are constrained to implement language in education policies that are, to put it mildly, irrational. They choose these options

> in plain view of the social costs of a monolingual system, that is, the costs of an elitist system where 25 percent of the national budget is spent for the education of 12 percent of all pupils.... (Coulmas 1992:149)

Language policy in the post-colonial situation

Because of the multilingual character of most colonially defined states in Africa and elsewhere and because of the intuitive policies of imperialist powers, the languages of Europe, specifically Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, English and French (on the African continent) became the languages of power. With very few exceptions, there were no systematic attempts during the colonial era to use any African language in high-status functions, not even in domains such as secondary and tertiary education. These are well-known facts and it is unnecessary to repeat the details on this occasion. Suffice it to say that on the morrow of political independence, the black elite which took over the reins of power were faced with a cruel dilemma. This has been formulated best by writers such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o. His famous essay on "The language of African literature" is one of the most eloquent and passionate denunciations of the cultural implications of colonialism and imperialism.

> **The real aim of colonialism was to control the people's wealth...(but) economic and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control. To control a people's culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others. For colonialism, this involved two aspects of the same process: the destruction or the deliberate undervaluing of a people's culture, their art, dances, religions, history, geography, education, orature and literature, and the conscious elevation of the language of the coloniser. The domination of a people's language by the languages of the colonising nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonised. (Ngugi 1994:16)**

The arguments which were marshalled by the new rulers in order to justify the adoption of the ex-colonial languages as the "official" languages of the respective independent, or liberated, countries are well known now. In summary, they fell into three different categories. Politically, it was said that the choice of any indigenous language would unleash a separatist dynamic which would destabilise the mostly very plurilingual African states. The second-best option was, therefore, to continue using the colonial language which, at the very least, was accepted by everyone and would not facilitate disruption and discontinuity. From having been the language of the oppressor, English, for example, became the language of national unity and of national liberation. Economically and technically, the use of the ex-colonial language made sense because there was already in existence in the countries concerned and through the overt and covert links between ex-colony and "mother country" a language infrastructure and a pool of skills in the form of appropriate books, dictionaries, registers, publishers, printers, trained professionals of all kinds as well as discourses and traditions which it would be both costly and unnecessary to imitate and duplicate in any of the African languages, never mind the quixotic notion of doing so in all of them. Culturally – although it must be said that this set of arguments was not used very often in Anglophone African countries, with the tragi-comic exception of Malawi under Dr Hastings Banda – it was taken to be axiomatic that the wealth of creative as well as scientific and technical literature and related artifacts in the European languages rendered them superior to the indigenous "vernaculars".

By way of reminding us of the agonising decisions which had to be made, allow me to cite two statements made by leaders of African independence movements, the first by President Milton Obote at the very beginning of the struggle soon after Uganda was given its independence by Britain , the second by Prime Minister Hage Geingob of Namibia in the last phase of the anti-colonial struggle. Obote, addressing the central question of national unity, hesitantly put forward the following

positions:

> The problem of culture...is essentially a problem of how best we can maintain and develop the various cultural forms in Uganda through a common language. I have no answer to this. I am well aware that English cannot be the media (sic) to express Dingidingi songs, I have my doubts whether Lwo language can express in all its fineness Lusoga songs, and yet I consider that Uganda's policy to teach more and more English should be matched with the teaching of some other African language. We are trying to think about a possible answer to the question of why we need an African language as a national language? Do we need it merely for political purposes, for addressing public meetings, for talking in Councils? Do we need it as a language for the workers; to enable them to talk and argue their terms with their employers? Do we need an African language for intellectual purposes? Do we need such a language to cover every aspect of our lives intellectually, politically, economically?
>
> I would not attempt to answer that question but it appears to me that Uganda at least is faced with a difficult future on this matter and the future might confirm that a decision is necessary to push some languages deliberately and to discourage the use of some other languages also deliberately (Obote, cited in Alexander 1989:40-41)

By the time Namibia was ready to take its independence from the increasingly demoralised apartheid regime, there was much more clarity on the implications of choosing one policy rather than another. Yet, the fundamental decision for English remained exactly the same. For reasons that have to do with the modalities of colonial oppression in the 19th and 20th centuries, it seemed as though every newly independent African state was doomed to take the same language policy detour by accepting in practice the primacy of the ex-colonial language, in spite of all the eloquent rhetoric to the contrary. Geingob, the Director of the United Nations Institute for Namibia at the time, wrote as follows in 1981:

> In spite of the difficulties inherent in the task of implementing English as the official language for Namibia, the Namibian people will rise to the occasion. This decision, however, does not imply that the indigenous languages are being dismissed. Local languages have a vital role to play in society and there will be a need for an overall multilingual language planning policy, both long-term and short-term, in which the various languages are institutionalized to their greatest advantage.
>
> The aim of introducing English is to introduce an official language that will steer the people away from linguo-tribal affiliations and differences and create conditions conducive to national unity in the realm of language. Inherent in the adoption of this policy are a number of issues and implications.... Will English become an elitist language, thereby defeating the goals for which it was intended? Will Namibia be able to obtain a sufficient supply of teachers trained in English to teach English? How cost effective and cost beneficial will the choice of English prove to be for Namibia?.... (UNIN: 1981)

From our own (South African) archives, the following statement gives some indication of the dilemma faced by the colonial and mission elite already at the beginning of this century. Dr Abdurahman, one of the early leaders of the"Coloured" community in South Africa, who was called upon, as President of the African People's Organisation (APO), to persuade the intellectual leadership of this group of people of diverse origin to decide which way to go in the light of the imminent dominion status that was to be conferred on South Africa after the defeat of the Boers in

1902, had no doubts whatsoever in regard to the language question. For a South African, what is most significant about this statement is the fact that it does not even consider it worthy of mention that besides Afrikaans and English, there was (and is today) a wealth of African (Bantu) languages used by more than 75% of the population as their principal means of communication.

> The question naturally arises which is to be the national language. Shall it be the degraded forms of a literary language, a vulgar patois; or shall it be that language which Macaulay says is "In force, in richness, in aptitude for all the highest purposes of the poet, the philosopher, and the orator inferior to the tongue of Greece alone?" Shall it be the language of the "Kombuis" [kitchen, NA] or the language of Tennyson? That is, shall it be the Taal [Afrikaans, NA] or English?....

In the official newsletter of the APO, we read the following editorial, probably written by Abdurahman himself, in which the coloureds are enjoined to:

> endeavour to perfect themselves in English - the language which inspires the noblest thoughts of freedom and liberty, the language that has the finest literature on earth and is the most universally useful of all languages. Let everyone...drop the habit as far as possible, of expressing themselves in the barbarous Cape Dutch that is too often heard (APO, 13/8/1910, cited in Adhikari 1996:8)

Needless to say, examples of this kind can be multiplied at will, not only from South African political and cultural leaders but from the rest of the continent as well.

Against the background I have sketched here, we ought not to be surprised, therefore, at the debilitating language attitudes of the vast majority of African people as they emerged out of the formal colonial era. However, these attitudes could not have been sustained if they were not integral to, and reinforced by, the political economy of the neo-colonial state. The nature of the post-colonial state in Africa has been analysed in great detail by many African and European scholars since the early 'sixties in terms of whatever paradigm was fashionable at the time such analyses were written, most recently that of post-modernism. I shall refer to it presently when I discuss globalisation, the latest buzzword we use to describe the often baffling developments that have changed so radically the modalities of the world economy. For the moment, I wish to refer to Pierre Alexandre's insightful and illuminating analysis of the relationship between neo-colonial language policy and the reproduction of social inequality. At the end of the 'sixties already, he noticed the way in which knowledge of English or French was tantamount to the acquisition of what we now refer to as "cultural capital" by the post-colonial elites.

> On the one hand is the majority of the population, often compartmentalized by linguistic borders which do not correspond to political frontiers; this majority uses only African tools of linguistic communication and must, consequently, irrespective of its actual participation in the economic sectors of the modern world, have recourse to the mediation of the minority to communicate with this modern world. This minority, although socially and ethnically as heterogeneous as the majority, is separated from the latter by that monopoly which gives it its class specificity: the use of a means of universal communication, French or English, whose acquisition represents truly a form of cultural accumulation. But this is a very special kind of capital, since it is an instrument of communication and not one of production. It is nevertheless this instrument, and generally this instrument alone, which makes possible the organization of the entire modern sector of production and distribution of goods (Alexandre1972:86).

Let us make it explicit, therefore, that it is an indisputable fact that in the post-colonial situation, the linguistic hierarchy that was built into the colonial system led to knowledge of the conquerors' language becoming a vital component of the "cultural capital" of the neo-colonial elite. It was and remains their knowledge of English and/or French that sets them apart from the vast majority of their African compatriots and which keeps them and their offspring in the privileged middle and upper classes. Pierre Bourdieu, among others, has refined the sociological analysis of this phenomenon as it manifests itself in both multi- and monolingual societies, so that, today, we have a very clear understanding of the intersection of language policy, language practice and socio-economic realities, including socio-economic stratification. The only question we need to pose here is the extent to which these elites cynically deny the realisation that for the overwhelming majority of "their" people, the type of proficiency in the relevant European, or world, language that would empower them is actually unattainable under present conditions. Alternatively, is it possible, that the argument from convenience emananting from bureaucratic inertia and from the opportunism of politicians for whom politics is no more than "the art of the possible" are the real explanation for what we call the "lack of political will" among African leaders when it comes to improving the status of African languages in their countries and the modernisation of the corpora of these languages? The debate on these issues is ongoing and is now hotting up because of developments in South Africa, among other things.

Globalisation, the ESL industry and the "underdevelopment" of African languages

In recent years, scholars such as Robert Phillipson and Tove Skutnabb-Kangas (1986), James Tollefson(1991), and others, have established the existence of what has been called the ESL industry and have criticised the pernicious effects of this industry. I want to do no more here than draw attention to the marginalising effects of this industry on the African languages and the consequent disempowerment of the speakers of those languages. A recent dissertation by Anjuli Gupta-Basu traces this process in detail for some of the languages of the Indian subcontinent. Among other things, she concludes that the popularity, spread and dominance of the English language has nothing to do with the popular perception of mythical or inherent linguistic properties of the language. Instead, she maintains that

> The dominance of English is due to conscious, co-ordinated and heavily funded (Anglo-American) institutional promotion programs, combined with functional, financial and professional incentives for the learners, in a world where hierarchically ordered and selected English-speaking people dominate all high-level political, military, scientific and cultural arenas. (Gupta-Basu 1999:249)

She traces the development and growth of this industry in Great Britain, the U.S.A. and English-dominant, Europeanised countries such as some of those of the British Commonwealth. In relation to India, she quotes Phillipson's observation that

> Those who fail in their quest for the alchemy of English see their life chances reduced. Those who become proficient in the alien language may sacrifice the language of their parents and their own culture in the process. The dominant language partially displaces other languages, through exclusive use of that language in certain domains (for instance in the media, or in the modern sector of the economy), and may replace the other languages totally. For well established languages the addition of English should represent no substantial threat, but in many parts of the world linguicist structures and processes have resulted not in English enriching other languages and cultures but in

English supplanting them (Gupta-Basu 1999:255. Also, see Coulmas 1992:46).

As far as Africa itself is concerned, we have numerous studies which demonstrate that these processes are replicated on our continent and that they are integral to what we call globalisation. Most recently, Alamin Mazrui (1997) has denounced the deleterious effects of the global ESL industry on the languages of Africa. In a hard-hitting article on the effects of World Bank policy on education and on the African languages as media of instruction, he concludes that

> The European languages in which Africans are taught are...important sources of intellectual control. They aid the World Bank's efforts to enable Africans to learn only that which promotes the agenda of international capitalism. Partly because of this Euro-linguistic policy, intellectual self-determination in Africa has become more difficult. And, for the time being, the prospects of a genuine intellectual revolution in Africa may depend in no small measure on a genuine educational revolution that involves, at the same time, a widespread use of African languages as media of instruction (Mazrui 1997:46)

Against the tide? The South African debate

The indisputable hegemony of English in the former African colonies of Great Britain gives rise to many profound questions about the future of the continent and its people. One such question is that relating to the developmental capacity of African people. Kwesi Prah (1996) and Paulin Djité (1993), among others, have stressed that the failure of virtually all economic development programmes and campaigns in many African countries may well derive from the fact that the concepts of science and technology are not embedded in the consciousness of the people of the continent, most of whom have either no grasp, or only a very inadequate grasp, of the European languages in which modernisation comes packaged to the continent. While much detailed research would be necessary in order to substantiate such a far-reaching hypothesis, I do not doubt that it is intuitively correct. If people are unable to acquire those habits of mind that constitute the substratum of the creativity of scientists and other innovators because these practices, like the priestly rituals of yore, are conducted in what is virtually an impenetrable secret language, the thinness of the residual social layer of people who have access to the language concerned guarantees that the nation as a whole will become mired in mediocrity and stagnation.

Everywhere in Africa, there is a struggle taking place between those of us who realise that, for the next few generations at least, there is no hope of English becoming the universal second language of the people of the continent, on the one hand, and those, on the other hand, who cynically, or even sincerely, promote the illusion that this is possible. There are profound socio-historical reasons for our caution as well as first principles, of democratic polities among other things. There is first of all what I call Tollefson's paradox, according to which

> ...inadequate language competence is not due to poor texts and materials, learners' low motivation, inadequate learning theories and teaching methodologies, or the other explanations that are commonly proposed. Instead, language competence remains a barrier to employment, education, and economic well being due to political forces of our own making. For while modern social and economic systems require certain kinds of language competence, they simultaneously create conditions which ensure that vast numbers of people will be unable to acquire that competence. A central mechanism by which this process occurs is language policy (Tollefson 1991:7)

Beyond this basic feature of the political economy of modern industrial societies, there is the historical fact that there are simply not enough proficient speakers of the English language in any African country, not excepting South Africa itself, to replicate the conditions of some of the countries of Britain's "Old Colonial Empire" such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Caribbean islands and the U.S.A. In these dominions, as we know, the native populations were either eradicated or enslaved or, via conquest and immigration, reduced to the status of minorities on their own land, so that the English language and Anglo-Saxon cultural forms became hegemonic in what seemed to be a completely "natural" process. Above all, however, there is the simple truth that no people, however small, can ever be content to transact their most important and most intimate business in a language which they do not command intuitively. None of the established nations of Europe would tolerate this for more than the space of a war in which they might have been temporarily defeated. There is no reason to assume that African people, or any people of the economic South, are different. For this reason, it is high time that the superficial and manipulative, number-crunching techniques of market research, on which the legitimation of the ESL industry is based be put to the question, along with its empiricist paradigm which, generally, does no more than measure the extent of the dominance of the ideas of the most powerful strata of the given society.

This position must not be confused with an anti-English prejudice or programme of action. On the contrary, as will become evident presently, we are in the vanguard of those in South Africa who demand that access to English become the right of all those who want it, precisely because such access is the key to power at certain levels of South African society as it is at present structured. It is because we have come to understand the relationship between underdevelopment, poverty, undemocratic political regimes and langauge policy that we, in South Africa, are committed to a policy of promoting multilingualism and modernising of the African languages. In doing so, we are in fact reviving the OAU Language Plan of Action for Africa written as long ago as 1986. Besides the intrinsic value of being proficient in a number of languages, it is obvious that in the post-colonial situation where lingua francas which cater for the whole nation either do not exist or where the former colonial language functions as such in restricted domains, knowledge of two or more national languages is a viable alternative and an essential practical strategy for the creation of national consensus and even of a sense of national unity. Moreover, given the arguments I have put forward above in respect of the absurdity of expecting African people to accept voluntarily that they must normally function in a foreign language, the imperatives of immediate empowerment (via that foreign language) and the broadening of democracy (via modernisation and the enhancement of the status of the indigenous languages) prescribe a policy of multilingualism in all social domains.

In an earlier review of David Crystal's book on *English as a Global Language*, Phillipson (1998) criticises the author for misrepresenting the position of those who oppose the displacement of indigenous languages by English:

> His admission that there are other views is reflected in quotations from Gandhi and Ngugi 'rejecting' English. However, the implications of this position are buried in comments on the expense of bilingualism. He does not name the counter-examples, such as Scandinavian competence in English being compatible with all affairs being conducted in local languages. Nor reflect on the cultural distance between the world of English and that of education for cultural continuity or subsistence farming needs in Africa. Ngugi has in fact nothing against the English language as such. What he objects to is the purposes to which it is put in global capitalism.

In South Africa, we have been witness to one of the most fascinating processes of language planning and language policy development for the past fifteen years or so. During the first five or six years what I have called "language planning from below" was conducted semi-underground in NGOs and peoples' organisations which were mobilising constituencies around the language question consciously with a view to changing the status of the African languages and of Afrikaans. I believe that there are many interesting aspects to this process, some of which may be useful to other countries in Africa and elsewhere. A forthcoming article by my colleague, Kathleen Heugh, and myself, traces the process in some detail and discusses the most important developments critically.

For our purposes, I wish to concentrate on the new language policy in education and discuss the dilemmas and the problems that this has given rise to. The official language policy in education was announced by Minister Sibusiso Bengu on 14 July 1997 (see Appendix). In doing so, he said, among other things, that

> The new language in education policy is...conceived of as an integral and necessary aspect of the new government's strategy of building a non-racial nation in South Africa. It is meant to facilitate communication across the barriers of colour, language and region, while at the same time creating an environment in which respect for languages other than one's own would be encouraged. This approach is in line with the fact that both societal and individual multilingualism are the global norm today, especially on the African continent. As such, it assumes that the learning of two or more languages should be general practice and principle in our society. This would certainly counter any particularistic ethnic chauvinism or separatism through mutual understanding. Being multilingual should be a defining characteristic of being South African (Bengu 1999:38).

In putting forward this position, the Minister was locating the new language in education policy squarely within the most progressive tradition of the post-colonial African intelligentsia, as it is enshrined in the OAU resolution of July 1986, which is called the Language Plan of Action for Africa.

In a nutshell, the most important feature of the policy in regard to language medium is its commitment to an additive bilingualism approach as the desirable norm in all South African schools. This implies, firstly, a commitment to what used to be called "mother-tongue instruction", i.e., L1-medium education, under the most favourable circumstances; secondly, parallel-medium schools in most situations, for economic as well as political and cultural ("nation-building") reasons; thirdly, dual-medium schools as the ideal, certainly for the next two or three generations, i.e., until such time as the African languages can hold their own with English and Afrikaans in high-status functions throughout the economy and the society. It also implies that single-medium educational institutions which are funded from the public purse in whole or in part will in future be the exception, not the rule, in South Africa.

The fundamental principle of the additive bilingualism approach to language in education, i.e., that the L1 of the learner should be maintained throughout the educational career of the learner and that other languages should be added on to this platform has a very significant political implication in the South African context. This derives from the fact that under the apartheid regime, so-called mother-tongue instruction had been used to indoctrinate black schoolchildren with a racist curriculum for social inferiority, an experiment that came to a catastrophic end with the children's rebellion which we know as the Soweto Uprising of 1976. As a result, besides the hatred for Afrikaans which Bantu education generated among black people, and the corollary orientation towards English as the language of power, of "unity" and of "liberation", L1-medium education

came to be equated in the minds of most black people with inferiority and racial ghettoisation. This truly baneful legacy of apartheid is, next to the lack of political will among most of the leadership of the country, the greatest impediment to the implementation of a successful policy of multilingualism, multilingual education and even of the modernisation of the African languages at the macro-linguistic level of planning.

Beyond its commitment to an additive bilingualism approach, the new language in education policy makes it abundantly clear that there is no single correct approach to the language medium question (see Appendix). It concludes by stating that

> Whichever route is followed, the underlying principle is to maintain home language(s). Hence, the Department's position that an additive approach to bilingualism is to be seen as the normal orientation of our language-in-education policy. With regard to the delivery system, policy will progressively be guided by the results of comparative research, both locally and internationally.

This apparent opening, or weakness, in the policy document has been taken as an opportunity by some scholars to question, and by others positively to undermine, the very foundations of the policy. As students of language planning and policy know well, this situation means that, in South Africa, we are about to enter one of the most decisive periods of debate, polemics and conflict in the domain of language policy. For, very few issues inflame the passions more than language-medium policy for schools. Our own history in the 20th century has seen two major rebellions, the first against the language-medium prescriptions of Lord Milner and the second against those of Dr Verwoerd, which the affected people considered to be oppressive.

It is regrettable that one of the most strategic research reports in the recent history of education in South Africa has failed to deal with the question of language medium policy with the requisite seriousness. I refer to the Report of the President's Education Initiative, which was pubished a few weeks ago (Taylor and Vinjevold 1999). In regard to the language medium issue, the report, after detailing in a very selective manner the findings of various research initiatives, poses - correctly, in my view - the two basic options with which we are faced in the new South Africa. Allow me, for the sake of accuracy, to cite the relevant passages in full.

> In these circumstances [they conclude, NA] it seems that government is faced with one of two alternatives:
>
> Allocating substantial resources to promoting added (sic) bilingualism
>
> The following steps would be needed to promote this course:

- advocating the advantages of additive bilingualism.
- the provision of books and materials in the indigenous languages of South Africa and ensuring that teachers in the lower primary are fluent in the primary languages of the pupils in their classes.
- the establishment of linguistically homogenous(sic) schools.

> Accepting the growing use of English as language of instruction at all levels of the schools system and promoting the conditions requisite for effective teaching and learning through English.

> **The following conditions are most frequently quoted in the international research as important for instruction in a second language:**

- **teachers' language proficiency in the target language.**
- **teachers' competence as language teachers with an understanding of problems of learning in a second language and how to overcome these.**
- **exposure to the target language outside the classroom.**
- **the provision of graded language textbooks especially in the content subjects in the early phases of learning...**

> **[They go on to say that, NA] It would seem that modernisation in South Africa and, the inexorable urbanisation in particular, is undermining the possibilities for the first alternative and that the more realistic option is a straight for English approach, except in linguistically homogenous(sic) classes where there is little exposure to English outside the classroom or where parents expressly request an alternative.**
>
> **Under these conditions, a research priority could be to examine the minimum requirements for successful teaching in English in South African schools - the teachers' English language competence, the books and materials required, the most effective ways of bridging the learners' language and English and other possible forms of support(Taylor and Vinjevold 1999:225-226).**

In this forum, it is unnecessary to scrutinise these disastrous passages in detail. They can (and will) be faulted on numerous grounds in various South African forums during the next few months. There are, however, two fundamental reasons why they are simply not to be countenanced. In the first place, besides going diametrically against the existing language in education legislation, they may be deemed to be unconstitutional, a matter which, clearly, would require a court of law to decide on should it be challenged by one or other lobby. More basic, perhaps, is the consideration that in a plurilingual country, it ought to be axiomatic that the languages of the citizens should be seen as assets or resources to be used in the most effective manner for the full development of all the people. One could compare this, in the South African context, to the existence of low-grade ore in many of our gold mines. Rather than close down such mines, the authorities and the owners do everything in their power to keep them going both because of their revenue-producing (wealth-creating) potential and because they provide jobs for thousands of people. It is the merest blindness and even callousness to be prepared to push to the margin the indigenous languages of the majority of our people which, as I have intimated variously in this paper, constitute an inestimable cultural legacy and potential on the one hand and the basis of a potentially vast (language) industry, on the other.

The hubris implicit in this lightminded recommendation is breathtaking, to put it mildly. It is exacerbated by the fact that the authors are among the best-intentioned educators in South Africa. Leaving all conspiracy theories aside, the global ESL industry, which is integral to the processes of globalisation as we have come to know it, could not have been offered a more attractive bonus at a more opportune time and place!

The wisdom of Joe Slovo

Against such thinking, we have to put the real alternative, based on a consideration of all the relevant data and comparative research in the light of a larger view of where we appear to be heading. To begin with, we have to reject the empiricist paradigm within which the data and the conclusions of such studies are generated. Because of the hegemonic effects of domination, generally

speaking, surveys of the kind on which these studies are based can, at best, indicate the extent of what we can advisedly call false consciousness. Because it is axiomatic that democracy and empowerment are served by people being able to use the languages they command best, it follows that formative research and advocacy (or awareness raising) rather than specious statistical misinformation are required in the kind of situation in which we find ourselves on the African continent. On the logic of the empiricist approach, if we were to give in to the male chauvinist ignorance of most of the people in Africa, we should be opposing the use of condoms in order to"fight" against the blight of AIDS!

These recommendations, which, unfortunately, are going to be very influential in the coming debates about the restructuring and reorientation of education in the new South Africa, are paradoxically parochial and even myopic, in spite of their seeming "internationalism" . They do not derive from a careful consideration of the global tension between the need for one or two world languages in order to facilitate trade, technology and diplomacy, on the one hand, and the national, sub-regional, and regional need for strong indigenous languages in which are captured the history as well as all the treasuries of culture of the world's diverse peoples and through the command of which alone, the individual human beings are able to develop their capacities to the full. Instead, like so much other fashionable "research", they have climbed on to the bandwagon of the marketisation of education.

In South Africa, we would be foolish to ignore the dynamics of language planning and language useage in the evolving systems of the European Union. Coulmas (1992:117) makes the point that the monolingual heritage of most European states is, ironically, the reason why the EU is willing to spend more on the maintenance of multilingualism in its institutions than any other international organisation. And, a recent conference where the question: Which Languages for Europe? was considered, concluded, among other things, that

> ...(Most) of the participants accepted - although some of them quite reluctantly - the idea that English (the so-called continental or international English) is becoming the *lingua franca* of the EU. It seems nothing will be gained by contesting this state of affairs. However, this does not close the issue, as there are still many unanswered questions....(Should) a political decision be taken about the *lingua franca* issue? Should the Gordian knot be cut at European political level? But on one thing everybody agreed: if English continues to take the lead, compensative political measures have to be taken in other domains: massive efforts of translation and interpretation and more facilities for passive comprehension. Multilingual policies should absolutely not be abandoned. The *lingua franca* and multilingualism should actually be standing side by side as two shutters of a common language policy (European Cultural Foundation 1999:8)

We would do well to remember one of the insights of the late leader of the South African Communist Party, Joe Slovo, one of the architects of the new South Africa. In justifying the compromises that were made by those who negotiated the settlement in 1993, he said, among other things, that there were certain limits to the willingness to compromise. These were determined by the understanding that we should not do anything in the short term that would make it impossible for us to attain our long-term goals. In my view, the recommendations of the Report of the President's Education Initiative, were they to be adopted and implemented, would constitute such an obstacle. Quite apart from the predictable failure of such an undertaking and the accompanying waste of resources and time, the strategy would set up patterns of behaviour and expectations, a "monolingual habitus" which it would be very difficult to alter in future. The dissertation of Gupta-Basu, to which I have

referred already, shows, in the Indian context, how complicated and frustrating the language question could become for future political and cultural leaders if we set our foot on this path. Ironically, most of the present generation of African political and cultural leaders have realised belatedly that the English- or French-only or English- or French-mainly language medium policies that they and their predecessors had followed for more than three decades after formal independence from colonial rule had in fact been a disastrous detour. Most of these countries are returning to mother-tongue medium precisely because the kind of "solution" recommended by the PEI Report has failed.

We have to adopt an additive bilingualism approach, as the new language policy in education prescribes. Without repeating what I have already described as the educational implications of this approach in respect of management, school architecture and organisation as well as classroom strategies, I want to conclude by saying very clearly that for the foreseeable future, such an approach, if carried out systematically but flexibly, will ensure very high levels of literacy in at least one African language for all future citizens, most of whom will not get beyond the junior secondary school (at best) for the next few decades, and at least some fluency in English (and probably in another African language). For the middle classes, there will be an almost guaranteed fluency as well as a high level of literacy in both their own first language and in English, at the least. In the course of the next century or so - and we *can* think realistically in such time frames today because of the progress we have made in language planning theory and practice - South African schools will normalise, i.e., they will tend to become single-medium institutions where additional languages, including English, will be taught as subjects by well-trained and highly proficient first- or second-language speakers of English, as happens in most countries in the world today. This is a calm and completely feasible view of where we *can* go; it happens also to be an unproblematical view of where we *should* go.

The proponents of the spread of English as a language, in spite of the fact that, unlike French, there is no threat to its hegemony, would do well to give heed to the strategic advice of Louis Calvet to the knights of the Academie Francaise. According to Dias (1999:18), Calvet advises that

> ...in Africa the future of French as a language is linked to the future of the development of the countries concerned and, therefore, to the future of the great African languages of (wider) communication....Without a linguistic policy based on this complementarity, there is no future for French...but there will also be no future for Africa, where French will remain a language of the elite, of power, while the people remain excluded from knowledge. That is what is at stake: it goes much beyond the French language and Europe; it concerns the economic and democratic future of the African countries. Obviously, it does not depend entirely on the countries of the North....And, what is valid for French, is also valid for other languages, e.g., for Spanish. The plea of the Quechua Indios of the Andes in Ecuador, in Bolivia, or in Peru is no different from that of the peasants in Africa.... The same applies to Portuguese in Brazil, in Angola and in Mozambique and, incidentally, to Mandarin in the major part of China. (cited and translated by P.Dias from Calvet, L'Europe et ses langues, p.142and 140)

Dias adds, "and also to Hindi in India and Afrikaans in South Africa". These languages can only maintain and expand their power if they simultaneously ensure that other indigenous or local languages flourish and develop.

I end off this address by saying as loudly as possible that social responsibility demands from all of us, whether we are educationalists, language planners or policy makers, that we ensure that

precisely because of the hegemonic position of the language, the same responsibility applies *above all, to English itself!*

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